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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

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FEDERATION INTERNAT. DES PROF. DE LANGUES VIVANTES

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IN ORDER TO FIND A SYNTHESIS FOR PRACTICAL INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN CIVILIZATION IN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS, SPECIFIC MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN TO COORDINATE ALL RELATED EFFORTS IN MAKING USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES AND TO DEFINE THE RELEVANT FUTURE NEEDS AND RESOURCES OF THE PROFESSION. EASY ACCESSIBILITY TO INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM A SMOOTH, EFFICIENT SYSTEM OF RESEARCH, STUDY, DOCUMENTATION, AND ACTION WOULD ASSIST THE TEACHER IMMEASURABLY IN UPDATING AND IMPROVING HIS INSTRUCTION. TO INITIATE AND DISSEMINATE TO TEACHERS SUCH NEEDED INFORMATION AS A GENERAL SUMMARY PAMPHLET OF THE FINDINGS OF MODERN SOCIAL SCIENCES RELEVANT TO LANGUAGE TEACHING, A LIST OF SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS AND RESEARCH CENTERS ACTIVE IN THE FIELD, AND THE RESULTS OF A SURVEY MADE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT METHODS WILL REQUIRE THE CREATION AND THE SUPPORT OF EFFICIENTLY ORGANIZED AND OPERATING NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. SIGNIFICANT ADVANCES COULD BE MADE IN COORDINATING FUTURE LANGUAGE ACTIVITY BY THE CLOSE COOPERATION, AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, OF THE GOVERNMENT AND A STRONG PROFESSIONAL GROUP AND, AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, OF THE COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "CONTACT," NUMBER 9, DECEMBER 1966, PAGES 18-27. (AB)

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International Cooperation in Foreign Language Teaching*

Mr. Chairman,

May I start by expressing my feelings of sincere thankfulness for the honor the Organizing Committee of this Conference did me in inviting me to present the theme of international cooperation in the teaching of the civilization of foreign countries. This theme has been very dear to me for a very long time. Nevertheless this does not fully outweigh my awareness of finding myself in a rather difficult position. Although I am in the country of Don Quichote, I am afraid that there is too much of the Sancho in me to enjoy this honour as much as his master would have done. I trust that you will therefore permit me to begin with a number of restrictions.

As foreign language teaching is, by definition, based on an international relationship, it is obvious that from the very beginning of our discussions, we could not avoid dealing with international cooperation. So, when I was reflecting on the best way to present this theme, I knew in advance that I would be obliged to repeat much of what had already been said more eloquently, by more competent and more expert speakers. I then decided that I could not but accept, and that I might best base my contribution on the lectures and discussions on the previous themes and then try to find a sort of synthesis for practical cooperation. The more so because it was one of the main objectives of this conference to discover and to locate the fields where action was most needed and, in order to be realistic and efficient, my recommendations had to take the findings of our combined efforts into consideration. It is for this reason that I paid close attention to the proceedings.

But I have to make still another restriction. Even if I succeed in arranging the well known facts and recent findings and experiences in such a way that this arrangement could be taken for a personal introduction to the subject of our conference, I would have to emphasize very strongly the words "personal," and "introduction," for two reasons:

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*) Text of the address given at the Conference "The Study of the Civilization of the Country Whose Language is being taught", organized by the Ministerio de Educación Nacional de España in cooperation with the Council of Europe, at Madrid (21 April—1 May 1965).

Primo: in spite of all the hard work that has been done, I at least, have not got a precise or complete survey of all the needs that have to be met, nor has it been possible for me to arrange the needs that have been formulated, in order of urgency and priority. As Mr. Neumann pointed out during one of our sessions, it will be necessary to give a follow-up to this conference in order to establish such a survey.

Secundo: Even if such a detailed list would be insufficient, because beside a list of needs we would need a list of resources that are at present available. Here again this conference has given much valuable and higly useful information that in its turn is far from being complete.

Thus, before we can decide on the final form of this cooperation, we urgently need full lists of both our needs and resources — institutions, study-centres, and so on; then the value of language teaching in problems of international relations can be fully appreciated.

Our first problem is to define the specific character of the material we want for just this teaching. The next question would be where to collect this material or how to produce it, if it is not yet available, and how to ensure a satisfactory and useful distribution of the material.

Before I proceed to that part of my presentation where I shall try to formulate on which subjects and in which fields research and study is needed and to give some indications on the lines along which, in my opinion, we could coordinate our efforts and make full use of existing resources, I should like to make some remarks of a more general nature on the character of the relationship between language and society, on the place civilization can or should have in foreign language teaching, on the dangers we should try to avoid and the priorities that must be observed.

What then is the specific character of the material we need, in order to combine civilization and language teaching? The more we discuss this point, the more it will be clear that agreement is impossible, and that there are as many answers as there are participants in the discussion. At the International Congress on Modern Language Teaching in Berlin last autumn, I made clear my point of view; among other things, I proposed the following: civilization is a concept of a very complex nature, and the content of this concept applied to any particular country is constantly changing.

As long as we are talking about civilization in general terms, it may be considered possible to define the term and its implications. In this respect language teachers are in a very favourable position. They can claim that the concepts of language and civilisation are absolutely inseparable. This definition is all embracing; there is not a single aspect of human thought or activity that can exist or be transmitted without language.

But, as soon as we concentrate on the civilization of a specific community, a speech community in our case, or a linguistic area as one of our colleagues suggested, and we are asked to define what is characteristic, for let us say, the Spanish, or the French or any other civilization, we are at a loss. Certainly, it does not seem to be too difficult to enumerate certain aspects

of the way of life of one of these peoples. We all have quite a number of stereotypes ready for those cases. But, do these ready made generalizations really define a civilization? Here the well known method of elimination can show us the relative value of those items. I give an example.

It has been said, and it seems to be true, that food symbolism is firmly incorporated in the social (and religious) rituals of all societies. At first sight this seems to hold true for our Western civilizations. Hence no textbook for the teaching of a foreign language will omit to give fairly detailed information on the food habits of the foreign country. But is a French teetotaller less "French" than the wine drinker? Or is the Englishman, who has grown accustomed to the continental breakfast, or who even prefers continental cooking in general, a social outcast? Or the Spaniard who never attends a bullfight? Examples can be added without end, and yet all these people may still be pure representatives of their "civilization."

Does that mean that these aspects of the way of life of a people are not an inherent part of its civilization? Certainly not. But what it does mean is, that it is extremely difficult to define a civilization and to circumscribe the elements of which it is composed and by which it can be identified among other comparable civilizations. It also means that we should be most careful in handling these stereotypes which are passed on from one generation to another and which, in that tradition, taken in the full etymological sense this time, have received the appearance of truth which can only turn out to be deceptive. The essence of a civilization is not the sum of an indefinite number of habits and customs, though they may help us in our search for understanding.

We need this help the more, because, as I said, a civilization is constantly changing. I do not deny the reality of lasting values in a civilization, nor do I deny the existence of the "esprit français" or the "Deutscher Geist," but, as language teachers, we have to confront our students with the manifold forms in which this spirit occurs and make quite clear that these forms are subject to change.

This creates a new, almost insoluble problem for our teaching. What should be its aim? Should we retreat into pure historical research, and look there for the lasting aspects and qualities of a civilization, or feel our way through the more confused contemporary world? The nature of our function leaves us no choice. We must deal above all with the language of today, and the civilization of today.

But how are we to reconcile the necessity for contemporary awareness with the traditional requirements of a humanist education that seeks for the roots of civilization in the past? This is our problem.

In this report it may be necessary to warn against the danger of what has been called the "parochialism in time," which is especially serious in highly developed countries, where, in modern times, the way of life is becoming more and more uniform. It is worth mentioning that, whereas we, Europeans, in our teaching of Spanish, French, German etc. assume that we are at the same time teaching the civilization of as many civilizations as we teach languages, many

American universities will offer courses in "European civilization." We should perhaps not insist too much on what is different, when some thousand miles distance can make us recognize that the differences are merely varieties of a common spirit.

Related to this aspect of our problem is the remark that has already passed into the conclusion of one of our working-groups: namely the situation of those smaller countries who teach the languages of other peoples but whose own language is not being taught. If we believe that united Europe is destined to become a reality before the end of this century and that foreign language teaching should not throw up barriers against this development, we cannot close our eyes to the need to give future generations a well balanced picture of European civilization. I deliberately ignore the fact that the acceptance of this concept throws a totally different light on the teaching of the civilization of countries and peoples whose languages we are teaching. Though, for scientific reasons, this factor must be considered, the demands of practical teaching must be given priority. All we can do is to keep this development in mind as a future possibility.

After these preliminary remarks of a general nature, I shall proceed to the enumeration of the fields in which research, study, and investigation are needed, and to the presentation of suggestions as to what should best be done, by whom initiatives should be taken and where, and to what degree cooperation, national as well as international, is indispensable. Three fields may be distinguished which partly correspond to the above mentioned terms: — research, study, and investigation:

1. Scientific research on basic facts, principles, methods.

2. The compilation of existing material, the providing of documentation, the analysis of material of any kind related to our subject, the description of practical work and the evaluation of it, etc.

3. All the activities that are part of the regular work of the foreign language teacher who understands and accepts the responsibilities which his task conveys to him in the framework of the entire education of our students.

It is obvious that scientific research can only be done by universities and spezialized institutions. The nature of scientific work *per se* removes the necessity to stress the need for cooperation, national and international. What we can do and what, far too often up to now, we have failed to do, is to formulate in very precise terms the problems that scientific research only can solve.

I do not presume to be able to give a complete list of all the problems that face our teaching of the civilization of a foreign country. I can only give an indication of the kind of problems which, I think, require scientific research.

1. How does the image of a country, of a people, take shape in the minds of children?

2. Of which elements does such an image consist?

3. Is there a regular order in which the different elements are integrated and if so, is there an optimal, or perhaps even a critical age for this integration?

4. What is the nature of stereotypes and prejudices? How do they originate? How are they reinforced? How can they be corrected?

5. What is the contribution of foreign language teaching to the formation of the image?

6. How and in what degree does the reinforcement of the image of a particular foreign country affect the attitude towards that country, towards other foreign countries, towards mankind in general?

7. What role are mass media playing in the creation of the image of another country?

8. What are the essential elements of the image of a given country or people?

I repeat, these questions do not pretend to be more than indications of the various subjects where scientific research might put basic facts at the disposal of our teachers; facts which would help them to find their way in a field that is not theirs and where they need the guidance of specialists: sociologists, ethnologists, psychologists, and applied linguists.

Still less do I pretend that up to now nothing has been done in this field. On the contrary: there is a vast literature on the origin of prejudice, the nature of stereotypes, the sources of tensions and of conflicts between peoples and nations and many other problems related to our subject. In many cases however, much has remained unanswered and the linguistic side of the problems has so far hardly ever received the attention it deserves from our point of view. Seldom too has the linguist cooperated in the formulation of the problem or in the laying down of the lines of research to be followed.

As these problems are of a general nature and concern more than the European area, the initiative for such basic studies should in my opinion be taken by an international body, perhaps Unesco. This would moreover offer the advantage that this organisation could continue the activity it has already started in this direction. I remind you of such publications as: "How nations see each other," published in 1953 and "The nature of conflict," published in 1957, publications which Unesco has for some reason discontinued. As however, Unesco has gone on in a parallel direction with its steadily growing Associated Schools Project, it would be easy, I think, to convince the Executive Committee of this organization of the importance of such basic studies. A stimulus from our side in the form of a recommendation or urgent wish would at any rate be appropriate.

Whatever has been done, little is known about it among language teachers.

This leads me to the next point: the need for studies, etc. In close connection with my previous recommendation I would like to express the wish that a study should be undertaken leading to the publication of those findings of modern social sciences that are relevant to the teaching of modern languages. Such a pamphlet — for it should indeed not be more lest it should not be read at all — should in a more or less popular but not vulgar form, summarize the most important facts and make further study possible by giving an annotated bibliography on "das Bild vom Ausland."

I immediately add another recommendation of the same nature:

That a list be drawn up of all the scientific institutions and research centers that are active in this field, in order that we may know where our demands for basic research can be addressed, and the names of those bodies whose cooperation could be solicited for investigations which — though not undertaken by these institutions themselves — require their expert advice and help.

Studies of this kind could well be undertaken under the auspices of the Council of Europe, though it might be desirable to cover the whole world. I believe that, for practical reasons and in this initial stage, it would be better to begin with a list that confines itself to the countries of western Europe. It would not be too difficult a task for the Secretariat of the Council to seek the necessary information from the different governments, nor too heavy a financial burden to charge somebody with the arrangement and editing of the material.

Parallel with these studies there should be investigations into the results of our present day language teaching with regard to the picture of the foreign civilzation which it creates in the minds of our pupils. We know very little about it.

Enquiries which incidentally have been undertaken with this in mind seem to show that there is little ground for optimism. In most cases our modern language teaching results in a picture that does not penetrate the surface of humoristic, quaint, fortunately inoffensive and sympathetic facts, which may be a mighty weapon in the hands of the teacher in his struggle to gain the interest of his students, but seldom does justice to the real civilization of a country. Such an enquiry, on a large scale, would not only serve as an evaluation of what we are doing at present, but it would give precious information to universities and other scientific institutions on those points where research as mentioned above is most needed. Besides, it would show the teacher where he has failed and where his methods have had the desired effect.

The main lines of such an investigation are clear. In our 18 countries there are only 5 languages that are generally taught: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Now, in our 18 countries a questionnaire could be drawn up about the way the boys or girls look at the people whose language they learn. It is worth considering asking the teachers to give their answers as well. A comparison of the views of teachers and students would no doubt be extremely interesting.

I shall not enter into the details of such an enquiry, I would only like to stress that, for the choice and the formulation of the questions, as well as for the analysis of the answers, a close cooperation would be needed between the representatives of the countries whose languages are taught and those of the countries where they are taught.

The value of such an investigation as the basis for a comparative evaluation of existing textbooks is clear.

But even if all these wishes came true, what can we do at this moment for the language teacher in service, who needs and demands full data on the civilization of the country whose language he is teaching?

I cannot answer this question without going into the fundamental question of the most adequate way in which international cooperation in the field of modern language teaching could be achieved and to present a picture, rough and undetailed as it has to be, of the lines along which this cooperation should be organized.

In order to keep this picture as simple as possible, I would like to distinguish in the field of interest in foreign language teaching four sectors, along two axes:

Governments	Council of Europe
National Associations	International Federation

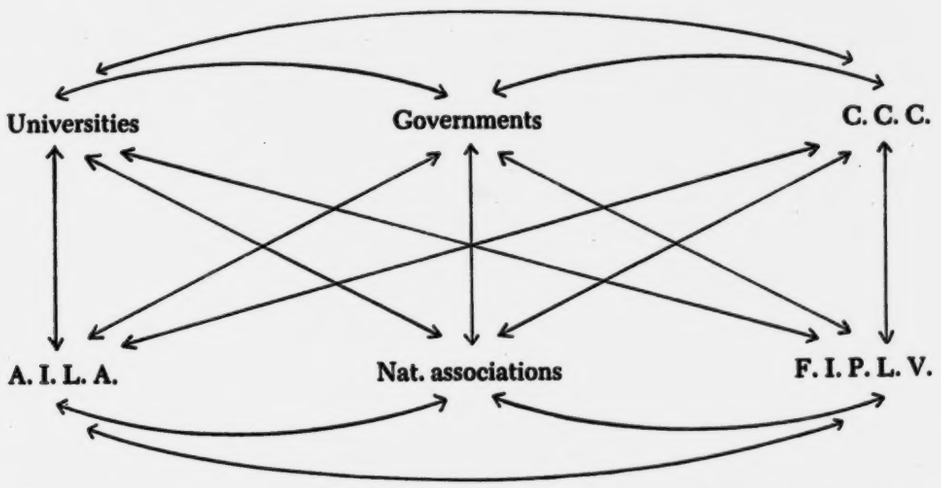
On the national scale we have: 1st the governmental level with the responsible ministers of education and the whole structure of legislation, regulation, supervision, inspection etc. and 2nd the level of the practicing teachers, who, in most countries, for obvious reasons, are united — in National Associations of Modern Language Teachers. As they became more and more aware of the fact that they have so many problems and so many interests in common, teachers first, governments considerably later, felt the need to join their efforts in creating adequate international bodies for coordination and cooperation: the latter in setting up the Council of Europe or more specifically and more recently, the Council for Cultural Cooperation (1962), the former in founding, as long ago as 1931, the International Federation of Modern Language Teachers, to which at this moment 20 countries are affiliated with a total membership of some 30.000 teachers.

It stands to reason that, first of all, there should be good cooperation on a national level between governments and all those who represent them, and the organization of language teachers, on questions that are of a pertinent national interest.

Similarly it is evident that, for matters of a wider scope, which concern two or more countries, the relations between the Council for Cultural Cooperation (C. C. C.) and the International Federation (F. I. P. L. V.) are of the utmost importance.

We are very happy to be in a position to say that both the C. C. C. and the F. I. P. L. V. recognize this fact and that both these bodies are doing everything possible to improve their cooperation.

In view of recent developments we will probably have to extend our scheme and to add to the governments and the C. C. C. those scientific institutions which I propose to list under the general term of Universities, while at the same time we will have to add on the other level the recently formed A. I. L. A. The lines of activity, exchange, interaction and cooperation, though complicated, are clear, as may be illustrated by this scheme:



There are of course essential differences in the nature of the interests these different institutions and organisations take in modern language teaching, as well as in their respective competencies and responsibilities and in the activities which they have to undertake. It is clear that, since this structure has only recently been completed, all the participating bodies will have to adapt themselves to it and that in these initial stages it is almost inevitable that from time to time mistakes are made, competencies are mixed up, frontiers are not observed and so on. The will to cooperate and the desire for efficiency will overcome all these difficulties.

The full development of all the possibilities for fruitful cooperation is still hampered by some factors of minor importance. Thus I do not ignore the fact that, at this moment, there are not yet national associations of modern language teachers in all the countries represented at this conference. But I am sure that we all agree that these should exist and we hope that in a near future there will be such associations in all the countries where foreign languages are taught. In this respect you will certainly permit me, Mr. Chairman, to congratulate our Spanish colleagues on the fact that, thanks to their persistent efforts, particularly those of Mme Martinez de Blanco, a Spanish association of modern language teachers has been welcomed into the ranks of the International Federation.

The national associations have a paramount role to play in the development we are aiming at.

Their members are from day to day confronted with practical problems and difficulties. They are in close contact with these problems and thus know best of all the specific needs. They, last but not least, possess the means, in the form of meetings, conferences, seminars, a bulletin, journal or review, to gather information, to further study, to organize training and retraining and to spread information and documentation in the widest sense among their members.

I further know that the Federation has not yet attained the phase of full maturity and that up to now it has not always been able to fulfil all the tasks which fall upon it.

I might quote a number of reasons for this: lack of resources, lack also of support from the national associations where the notion of international co-operation had to grow, in this field as well as it had in the domains of economics and politics. This situation however is rapidly changing. More national associations have affiliated during the last 10 years than in the previous 20 years. The associations themselves are daily getting stronger and, thanks to the understanding of the associations, the Federation is now able to do what the large majority of all modern language teachers in our countries are expecting from it.

It would therefore be wise to follow those lines that lead directly to the modern language teacher in the class-room.

With regard to our subject this means that everything should be done in order to raise the activity and the efficacy of the national associations so that they can give the services their members ask from them. One of these services, and a very important one, is that of passing on documentation to their members. Teachers cannot be expected to gather all their information themselves. The number of centers, offices, institutions, organizations is too great for any individual teacher to know all about them.

The association has to put the information at his disposal, if possible in co-operation with the associations in other countries.

I would therefore like to recommend that in those countries where this is desired, governments should be urged to give the necessary help and support.

The French association has given an extremely good example: it recently published an issue of its bulletin "Les Langues Modernes" for the information of the teachers of the various languages that are being taught in France. This issue gives all the information we have been speaking of: addresses of study centers, embassies, consulates, institutes, associations, cultural organisations, journals, bulletins, reviews, etc. etc.

Every national association should follow this example or, better still, why should not the French "Memento" be completed with information on services and publications of a more local scope and then be published as a joint publication of all the associations of the countries where French is being taught. The same could be done for the benefit of the teachers of English and the other languages.

The F. I. P. L. V. might well take the initiative, coordinate the work, solicit financial support from the respective governments and from the Council of Europe, which these undoubtedly would be willing to give. The F. I. P. L. V. could then publish such information for the different languages as separate issues of its bulletin "Contact."

In this respect I believe that the teacher of French is in a very favorable position. High tribute should be paid to the services of "La documentation française," a whole series of official publications by which the teacher of French can keep informed on the latest developments in almost every field of French political, economic, technical, scientific, cultural and artistic life, a real goldmine which, I fear, has not yet been sufficiently been exploited. Similar tribute is

due to the research centers like CREDIF, the CREC, the BEL and to that extremely well edited "Le Français dans le Monde." Thanks to them the teacher of French has little or no excuse if he is not adequately equipped and sufficiently documentated on the rapidly changing forms in which the French people is expressing the essential character and the lasting values of its civilization. If I have especially mentioned the enviable position of the teacher of French, that in no way means that their colleagues of other languages have to stand there with empty hands. They too have an ample number of resources for documentation at their disposal. But, I repeat, they should be guided in their search for those services, and the above mentioned publications would be a good means to help them.

Deliberately I have not mentioned many subjects that require closer attention, study or research: I would have liked to speak of the need to draw up a list of requirements for in-service training courses, of the modalities of assistant-ships and so on. Fortunately there are three reasons for which I can, with a quiet conscience, abandon my intention to be complete. First of all: you are examining the whole field of the teaching of civilization so thoroughly that the conclusions and resolutions will certainly ask for action that will cover at least the next ten years. Secondly: I know that the C. C. C. has undertaken a number of studies that sooner or later will throw more light on such questions as the training of teachers, the in-service training, tests and examinations and so on. And last of all: within four months there will be the triennal Congress of the International Federation at Uppsala, Sweden. Any wish that may have remained in statu nascendi here, will certainly come to life there. So nothing will be lost and some time will be gained when I come to a conclusion. Moreover, as the cooperation we need has only just started and the whole machinery has still to be run in, we should not overstrain it.

To end, I shall return to the beginning. Despite my apparent demands for a smooth, efficient system of research, study, documentation and action, I am aware that the value of this machinery lies not in its mere existence, but in the spirit in which it is used, and I cannot conclude with more suitable words than those of Saint Exupéry: "L'essentiel n'est pas visible aux yeux, il ne se voit qu'avec le cœur."

Daam M. van Willigen